

Decolonising the Curriculum through the Introduction of Key Artists

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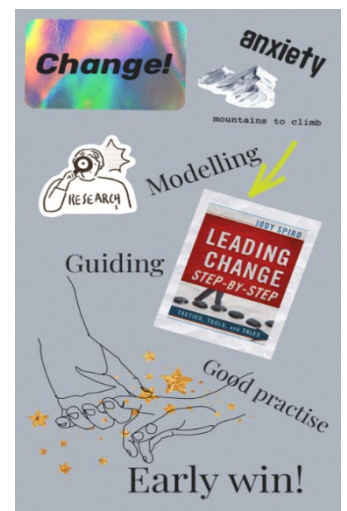
Background and Aspirations



After returning from maternity leave and retaking the position of Art lead in the school, I had a lot to catch up on. Oakdene had been awarded Artsmark Platinum in my absence and the momentum for cultural education in the school was growing. I therefore decided to focus my attention on current whole school priorities; one of which was 'decolonising the curriculum'. My first step was to rehaul the current key artists studied by each year group. Looking at the existing artists, I noticed that there wasn't much variation in the types of artists studied. They were mostly classical. I therefore began to allocate new artists to year groups that covered a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, genders and time periods. In doing this, I thought about what my hopes were for each child by the time they left in year 6. I wanted the children of Oakdene to have a curriculum which inspires, informs and nurtures their talents and abilities. My aspiration was that each child would leave Primary school with a rich understanding of a variety of artists from around the world and have had the opportunity to learn key skills by exploring and recreating artwork from different cultures and era's.

Introducing the Project

After an initial staff meeting, the overall goal of what we wanted to achieve for the Oakdene Art curriculum was clear, however this was and is going to require a lot of change. Confidence in teaching Art in KS2 is currently low and so some staff were anxious about introducing something new. Therefore, after studying Jody Spiro's; 'Leading change step by step' model, I decided to "build in an early win". I would carry out a project in Year 4 studying their new key artist Andy Warhol. This would allow me to share good practise, model expectations and gather feedback through pupil voice. I planned for the children to study the artist in detail, linking their learning in ICT through research and English through writing fact files and biographies. The children were going to be absorbed in the life and works of Andy Warhol for the next 5 weeks.



Development of the project

I couldn't have wished for a better response from the children when I introduced the project. Their enthusiasm was overwhelming with collective echoes of 'YES' each time I said we were continuing our Andy Warhol project. The main change I wanted to integrate into the teaching of the new key artists was to allow children time in the curriculum to immerse themselves in the life of the artist they were studying. Key Stage 1 showed very good practise in researching artists and creating fact files. I wanted Key Stage 2 to take this one step further and so the Year 4's linked their English unit on writing biographies and wrote detailed biographies about Andy Warhol. The children loved learning about his life and it was amazing to see them make links between his life and other artists they have come across.



Analysis of artists work is a complicated skill and one that many children struggle with. I worked meticulously with the children to begin with, looking carefully at some of Warhol's pieces and delving into the feelings and emotions they created in the children. The children initially found it difficult to respond to different paintings, but after modelling and looking at a variety of questions they began to open up. The language they used began to be more emotive and individual and they were able to look at the different elements of art Warhol had used and how he used them.

Now that the children had a good understanding of their artist, where he had come from, what inspired him and how his artwork provoked different emotions in people, it was time to have a go at creating some of their own Warhol style artwork. I wanted the children to experience a variety of techniques when creating their art. The children made their own versions of 'Marylin Monroe' using the 'Abstract Me' app on the ipads, they created printed style images using tracing paper and had a go at observational drawings using line as their focus. All children showed passion for their own pieces and created exceptional artwork to be proud of.

Evidence of Impact

Overall, impact is hard to measure at this stage as the key artists are still being integrated by each year group and will continue to be over the coming year. Individual impact in Year 4 shows great success. The children have shown a deep understanding of their artist, along with the time period and culture in which he lived and worked. They are able to talk about his influences and techniques confidently. Sketchbook work shows evident progress from their last pieces with a clear development from analysis of the artist's work, to re-created images, through to children's own interpretations. Responses from pupil voice show that it has been a successful project which has achieved its aim.

The children's processes through this project will now be shared with the rest of the staff as a model to implementing other year group's artists. Year 5 have already begun to research their artist Freda Kahlo and I have worked with the year 5 staff on ideas for creating inspired pieces.



Challenges and Reflections



After trialling the project in Year 4, I can foresee the biggest challenges being time in the curriculum and teacher confidence. Reflecting on the journey of this project and the time it has taken, it may be beneficial to block out a week of the curriculum each year to study Key Artists. Teacher confidence in the teaching of Art, especially in KS2, is low at the moment. I have therefore begun to set up a cultural partnership with an artist named 'Jacqui Smith' who has done great work in other schools. I have planned in a whole school CPD with Jacqui in the coming weeks and she is enthusiastic to work with individual teachers were necessary. I hope that this will be a cultural partnership that is able to thrive and grow with mutual benefits for all involved.